

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**INSURGENCY IN A SMALL COUNTRY, ETHNIC REVOLT IN  
SRI LANKA**

by

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The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

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## ABSTRACT

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This project will examine the principles of insurgency in a small country and the reasons for it to survive for such a long period.



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## **PREFACE**

The foundation of this research was initially from my experience serving in the north and east of Sri Lanka for over 22 years of my service career. I had the fortune of meeting most of the IPKF officers and Sri Lanka government officials serving in the northern and eastern province who provided me with a wealth of information. In addition, I gathered much of the information from my numerous posting in the areas of conflict.

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## INSURGENCY IN A SMALL COUNTRY, ETHNIC REVOLT IN SRI LANKA

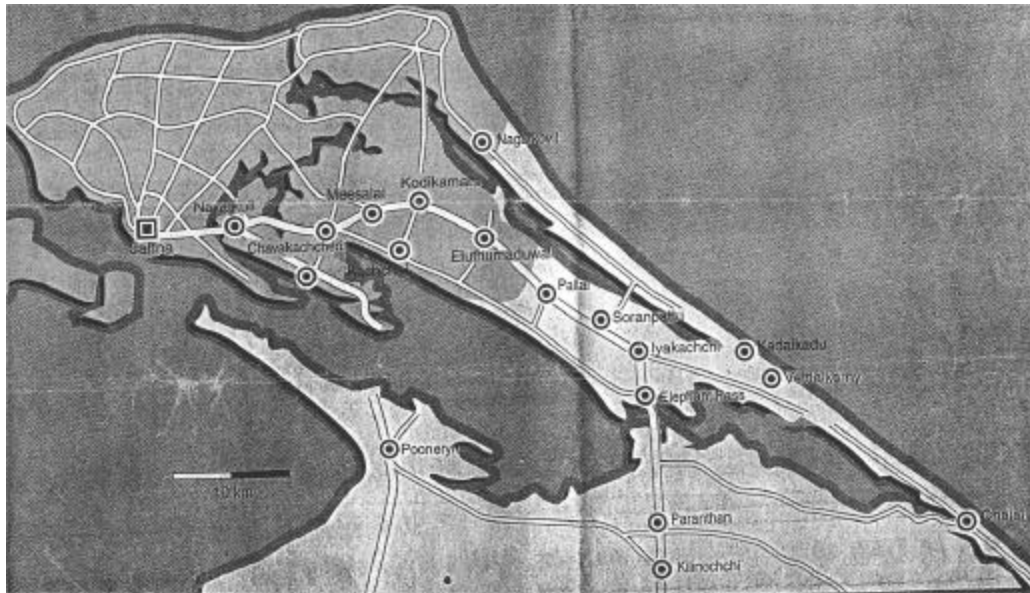


FIGURE 1. JAFFNA PENINSULA

### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The protracted insurgency in Sri Lanka is a vicious by-product of prolonged ethnic conflict between Sri Lanka's majority Sinhala Community and the minority Tamil Community. The current wave of violence can be traced back to the early 1970s, when a group of Sri Lankan Tamil politicians who had lost power in an election began to campaign earnestly for an independent Tamil State. Their rhetoric against the Sinhala community and the government in Colombo galvanized a few employed and under-employed Tamils to take up arms against the state. The formative phase of violence inspired by Tamil nationalism was directed against fellow Tamils who did not support the idea of a separate state; these victims included Tamil politicians, police officers, government officials and suspected informants.

Sri Lanka's armed forces were incapable of meeting the militant threat during this period, not unsurprisingly, given that they were primarily trained to perform ceremonial functions. By the time the military was able to transform itself into a professional fighting force, the militants had developed a mastery of guerrilla warfare. The bloody ethnic riots of July 1983<sup>1</sup>, a watershed in the history of Sri Lanka polarized the two communities<sup>2</sup> and were a reaction of a

segment of the majority community to the deaths of 13 soldiers in an ambush by the most formidable Tamil militant group – the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).<sup>3</sup>

Following this, over one million Tamils left Sinhala areas for the predominantly Tamil northern and eastern provinces of the Island and almost all the Sinhalese left the north. From 1983 to 1987, Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups recruited, trained and armed over 20,000 Tamil youths. With the cooperation of a sympathetic Tamil Nadu<sup>4</sup> state government and the New Delhi central government, militants began to build up their arsenal and expertise. About 500,000 Tamils who left for neighboring India and the West sought asylum as political refugees; they became the economic backbone of the militant campaign.

The powerful presence of an international link was a major morale boost for the Tamil insurgents in Sri Lanka. It was a form of recognition of their struggle both domestically and internationally. The international component enhances domestic survival and contributes to the resilience of an organization. Although there was limited financial assistance until the ethnic riots of July 1983, there were many Tamils who were sympathetic towards the Tamil cause and waiting for an opportunity to make a contribution for the advancement of Tamil nationalistic aspirations and goals. The ethnic riots deeply wounded the sentiments and galvanized the Tamils as a community. Past tragedies were brought to light and kept alive by the political leaders on both sides.

From 1977 onwards the LTTE international network made inroads to countries where there was a Tamil presence<sup>5</sup>. From the mid—1970s onwards, the Tamil militant structures steadily grew in the west, with its nucleus in London. The linkages were mostly confined to the Middle East, for military development, and to Europe and elsewhere like Nigeria, Yemen, and Zambia for financial assistance. By the 1980s, Tamil militant representatives had traveled far and wide. The Arab and the Islamic world were important but so were countries where Tamils lived, worked and earned in substantial number. They were Libya, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Algeria, Morocco, Turkey and Yemen. They also had substantial contacts with Cyprus and Greece. The government in Colombo failed to keep track of Tamil political activities overseas.

Prior to July 1983, all efforts by Tamil insurgent groups and their representatives to raise money overseas to sustain a war had been unsuccessful. It was only after July 1983, with the exodus of over 100,000 Tamil refugees and another equal number of displaced persons that gave birth to a distinct Tamil Diaspora.<sup>6</sup> By the end of 1983, there were over 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamils in Tamil Nadu alone and this number would swell up to nearly 200,000 with the escalation of the conflict. The exodus to the west was equally intense. Many countries in the west, sympathetic to the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils would revise their immigration and

emigration policies vis-à-vis Sri Lanka. As a consequence, the number of refugees, mostly economic but in the guise of political asylum seekers, would bring the totality of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora to over 450,000.

From 1983 onwards the LTTE established offices and cells throughout the world, building an international network unsurpassed by Armenian, Kurd, Sikh, Lebanese or Palestinian militants. Today, the LTTE international infrastructure includes six ocean-going ships<sup>7</sup>, offices and cells and a state-of-the art network designed to disseminate anti-Sri Lankan state propaganda and raise funds for advancing the goal of a separate Tamil state. Their worldwide network facilitated the purchase of weapons from private arms dealers and government using false end-use certificates. While the LTTE international secretariat is located in London, the guerillas have 40 offices – in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Scandinavia, Canada, Australia and one recently opened in Japan – to lobby against aid and assistance being provided to Sri Lanka. In the US, the LTTE has offices in Chicago, Boston, New Jersey, New York, Maryland, Washington D.C and several in the states of California and Texas.

Reprisal killings and civilian deaths in the crossfire of firefights strengthened the militant movement and the resultant publicity tarnished Sri Lanka's reputation as a fledgling democracy and a popular tourist destination. With finance from overseas and pledges of sustained support, the level of violence escalated. LTTE recruitment was targeted on the naturally motivated families that have suffered at the hands of the Sri Lankan armed forces. The militant campaign developed into an insurgency. Ill-conceived counter insurgency measures involving artillery and other means of heavy firepower to minimize military casualties, resulted in high civilian casualties and generated greater support for Tamil militancy. Explosives, weapons and other supplies came mostly from India, only 36 miles away and a 45-minute cruise by speedboat. The SLN intercepted only a fraction of the militant arsenal.

Although Tamil insurgents had established a few training camps in Tamil Nadu in 1982, there was no official assistance from the Central government of India prior to August 1983. In the eyes of many Indian hard-liners, Sri Lanka since 1977 had stepped out of the non aligned orbit and had become an ally of the west.<sup>8</sup> There were Israeli intelligence operatives, British counter insurgency experts, South African mercenaries, and rumors about offering Trincomalee, one of the finest deep water harbors, to the US navy. Sri Lanka had good relations with Pakistan and China, two countries that had fought border wars with India and they were in the process of stepping up military assistance to Colombo. Further, President Jayewardene of Sri Lanka did not enjoy with Premier Indira Gandhi<sup>9</sup> the same warm relationship he had with her

father, Premier Jawaharlal Nehru. Premier Indira Gandhi, also the leader of the powerful Congress(I) Party, took a policy decision to support Sri Lankan northern insurgency from August 1983. The need to have leverage over Colombo was adequately demonstrated by the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the agency also responsible for advancing India's secret foreign policy goals. Within her inner circle, the decision was justified. Geopolitics and domestic compulsions validated the rationale. The third agency of RAW, a supra intelligence outfit, was entrusted with the task. Within a year, the number of Sri Lanka Tamil training camps in Tamil Nadu mushroomed to 32. By mid 1987, over 20,000 Sri Lankan Tamil insurgents had been provided sanctuary, finance, training and weapons either by the central government, state government of Tamil Nadu or by the insurgent groups themselves. While most of the initial training was confined to Indian military and para military camps in Uttara Pradesh, specialized training was imparted by the Indian instructors attached to RAW to Sri Lankan insurgents in New Delhi, Bombay and Vishakhapuram.<sup>10</sup> The most secretive training was conducted in Chakrata, north of Dehra Dun, India's premier military academy for training service personnel, where RAW had also imparted training to Bangladesh, Pakistan and Tibetan dissidents.<sup>11</sup>

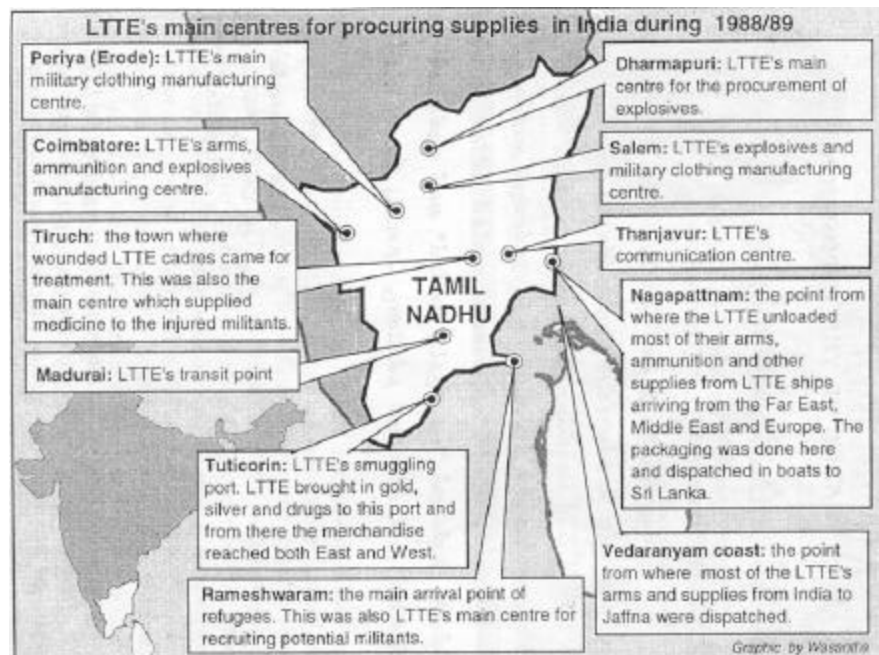


FIGURE 2: LTTE'S MAIN PROCUREMENT BASES

Toward mid 1987, India, realizing that the Sri Lankan insurgency was having a spill-over effect, worked concertedly towards mediating the conflict between the government in Colombo and the Tamil groups. In Tamil Nadu, 3 per cent of 60 million Tamils supported 22 small but significant Indian Tamil political and militant groups campaigning for Dravidas, an independent Tamil state in India. Furthermore, the Cold War – in which India acted within the Soviet sphere of influence and Sri Lanka was within the Western sphere of influence was coming to an end. On 29 May 1987 an Indo-Lanka Peace Accord, devolving greater autonomy of the Tamils and preserving India's geopolitical and strategic interests in the region, was signed between Premier Rajiv Gandhi<sup>12</sup> and President J.R. Jayawardene. The accord entailed the deployment of 100,000 Indian soldiers to maintain peace between Sri Lankan troops and Tamil militants. Until the accord, the LTTE had been a highly secretive Tamil militant group shielded from the public eye. All the Tamil militant groups, except the LTTE that had developed an independent network of international support, joined the political mainstream. Among these groups were the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam,(PLOTE), Eelam People Revolutionary Liberation Front,(EPRLF), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization,(TELO), Eelam Revolutionary Organizers,(EROS), and the Eelam People's Democratic Party(EPDP). After three months of peace the LTTE declared war on the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF),<sup>13</sup> confirming the constraints facing the transition from militancy to politics. During the two years of fighting, the battle hardened LTTE matched a much larger, resourceful and formally trained military.<sup>14</sup>

As a consequence of the deployment of foreign troops, a Sinhala nationalist force – the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) - declared war on the government. Some 40,000 Sinhalese, mostly youths, were extra judicially killed by state-sponsored death-squads in the south. Sri Lanka, hitherto a model democracy of the west, proved incapable of fighting a military campaign while retaining the characteristics of a fully-fledged democracy. The island recorded the highest number of political murders during 1988-89 of any country in the world. In a tactical move to relieve the mounting Indian pressure, the LTTE agreed to hold talks with Colombo. When Jayawardene's successor, Ranasinghe Premadasa, called for the withdrawal of the IPKF, New Delhi refused. Premadasa then sanctioned covert military assistance to the weakened LTTE. Finally, the IPKF departed from the shores of Sri Lanka in March 1990, although it left behind a heavily armed proxy force. This was decimated<sup>15</sup> within a few weeks by the combat efficient LTTE.

Within three months, the LTTE broke the cease-fire and declared war on the government, and executed 400 Sinhala policemen who had surrendered. This seemed to confirm the theory



that the LTTE always uses periods of peace to gain International recognition, disseminate propaganda, generate funds, procure supplies, gather intelligence, regroup, retrain and recruit. After a decade of battle the LTTE had grown from a small force of 3,000 in 1986 to 16,000 in 1996. Sri Lanka witnessed the emergency and the systematic elimination of 30 Tamil groups by the LTTE, as well as the death of 100,000 people, mostly civilians (including southern killings).

The LTTE also eliminated the alternative Tamil leadership, including Appapillai Amirthalingam,<sup>16</sup> the leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the party that had dominated conservative Tamil politics over the years. After labeling members of the rival Tamil groups as traitors, the LTTE declared itself the sole representative force of the Sri Lankan Tamil speaking people. The LTTE controlled the northern province until late 1994, while Sri Lankan troops fought LTTE deployments in the eastern province. Throughout the 1990s the LTTE staged several suicide attacks in Colombo, eliminating important leaders, including Ranasinghe Premadasa, who had aimed to conquer the LTTE on the battlefield.



*Suicide body suit of the LTTE, also referred to as the suicide bomb kit or the belt bomb. Prabhakaran, conceptualized and operationalized the body suit after watching a movie - Death Wish II, in which an attractive woman carrying a bouquet of flowers explodes herself killing a world leader. Western intelligence and security agencies consider the LTTE produced body suit as more sophisticated than the rudimentary suits produced by their Middle Eastern, Asian and, since very recently, their European counterparts. The body suit of the LTTE has been refined since it was first used to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi. In 1996 alone, a LTTE tailor stitched 125 body suits and saturated both the northeast and Colombo with bombers.*

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FIGURE 3: LTTE'S SUICIDE KIT

Premadasa was killed on 1 May 1993 by a LTTE suicide bomber who had infiltrated his household during the peace talks. LTTE hit squads had also assassinated rival Tamil leaders in India and a female suicide bomber had killed Rajiv Gandhi in May 1990. Gandhi was killed to pre-empt the reintroduction of the IPKF, ensured the LTTE's long-term survival. Since then, the LTTE has been proscribed in India, but the LTTE still operates there through 22 Indian Tamil political and militant groups campaigning for an independent Tamil state in India. A new

government formed by President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge initiated peace talks with the LTTE in late 1994, but the LTTE violated the cessation of hostilities and returned to war in April 1995.

#### FIGURE 4 - NORTH AND EAST PROVINCES

Secretariat in London wrote to the new Indian Premier Inder Kumar Gujral in March 1997 seeking rapprochement with India.

## **EVOLUTION OF THE LTTE**

With the expansion of the LTTE network overseas, the LTTE domestic structure has grown in strength and sophistication. Yet, some features of the LTTE never changed. Despite several offers for international mediation and attractive propositions both by India and Sri Lanka to resolve the political question, the LTTE remained rigid in its stand on Tamil Eelam.

In many ways, the LTTE did not evolve but revolved. At the heart of it was Prabakaran, an innovative, calculating and a ruthless military genius. Although, he subsequently developed political sophistication, he never compromised his faith in violence as a means to reach a political goal. Unlike most other groups, the LTTE began as a military organization but in time developed the political structures. Like most revolutionary movements of today, the LTTE is not a political organization that developed a military capability. History has shown that it is a near impossibility for organizations that are inherently militant to enter the political mainstream. The leadership of such organizations thinks and acts primarily militarily, and secondarily politically. By virtue of their structural compulsions, such organizations prefer to fight continuously and win militarily. Such organizations feel uncomfortable to compete in a political environment.

At leadership level, Prabakaran maintains a tight control. He is the final authority on each and every major issue. Prabakaran's decision has always gone unchallenged. If Prabakaran is killed, will the LTTE die? Examining similar organizations, particularly the capabilities of their middle level leadership, after the death or arrest of their senior leaders, provide a vital clue. Did the JVP or the Sendero Luminoso die after the death of Wijeweera or the capture of Guzman?

Although the death of Prabakaran will be a massive blow to the LTTE, the middle level leadership of the LTTE is equally or more motivated than its senior level leadership. History shows that organizations like the LTTE cannot be easily eradicated. Despite their inability to meet their avowed goals and the massive sufferings they have brought upon the Tamil public, segments of the Tamil people still believe in them and support them. For some, particularly for those who had lost a loved one during the ethnic riot or killed by a soldier, Prabakaran is a demi-god. They also believe that if they die fighting for their cause, they will be treated like saints by the Tamil society.

As much as the moderate Tamil politicians have failed, successive governments in Colombo have not done their best for Sri Lanka. Even the best of Sri Lankan leaders have

faltered. Colombo has failed to understand the aspirations of the Tamil people, the equation between the Tamil insurgents and the Tamil public, and finally the importance of non military dimensions of counter insurgency. These dynamics have also impeded the government from dampening the Sri Lankan Tamil insurgent – Diaspora link. Governments have miserably failed to develop and implement non-military strategies primarily counter propaganda amongst the Diaspora and in the LTTE dominated areas of the northeast. To what degree has the Diaspora, the backbone of LTTE finance generation, has helped the LTTE to develop its range of contacts for procuring weapons too. What will be the outcome of allowing a Diaspora to expand and root in this manner? Will the LTTE become more confident and less amenable towards negotiations?

The expansion of the LTTE network overseas has brought them closer in contact with other insurgent groups. The LTTE has developed ideological, financial and technological linkages with other insurgent groups. Technologically, the LTTE has established links with the Assamese guerillas, Punjabi Sikh insurgents, Andhara Peoples War Group, the Kashmir mujahidin and several groups within and outside the region. Such groups exchange and purchase weaponry from diverse sources thereby contravening the established international arms control conventions and agreements. As insurgent group develop their structures to raise funds in one location, operate from another location and fight in a third location, law enforcement agencies of governments are constrained from conducting extra – territorial operations.

### **CHAIN OF COMMAND**

The LTTE organization is geographically structured into seven regular commands under special district commanders responsible to Prabhakaran. In the LTTE, all members are fighting cadres and do not receive remuneration. The exceptions are only to a handful who plays an advisory or supportive role. The cadres of the seven commands<sup>21</sup> belong broadly to political and military wings and are further sub-divided according to the specialist roles they play. In the LTTE are departments for political, military, intelligence, Sea Tigers, women, finance and procurement activity.

Cadres are given responsibility not according to seniority but strictly on performance. Cadres are not promoted to a rank but only responsibilities of command. Cadres are ranked only posthumously by taking into account their service, as well as the circumstances of their death.

## ROLE AND DEPLOYMENT

Politically the LTTE attempts to control parts of the northeast by providing a reasonably well-managed administration. The Sri Lankan state continues to provide essential items to citizens, even in LTTE controlled areas, to prevent a humanitarian crisis.<sup>22</sup> Controlling territory helps the LTTE to radicalize the Tamil public into supporting the LTTE by providing finance and recruits. The LTTE legitimates its military action by providing the international community the idea that Tamil people are being deliberately discriminated against, as a matter of policy of the Colombo government. The LTTE forces engage the Sri Lankan military deployments in the northeast by labeling them an 'army of occupation'.



FIGURE 5 - MAP OF SRI LANKA

The LTTE goal is to achieve an independent Tamil state by the year 2003. To establish greater control over intelligence, the pre-requisites for establishing an independent state, the LTTE has launched plans to create a 'Tamil Only' northern province. To meet that objective, the LTTE has systematically engaged in a program of ethnic cleansing, driving out non Tamils from the Northern Province. Today, with the exception of the security forces and the civilians engaged in the administration of Jaffna, there are no Sinhalese and Muslims in the Northern

Province except in Weli Oya. In the Eastern Province, where the LTTE frequently targets civilian villages, the population ratio of Tamils to Muslims to Sinhalese is almost equal.

To weaken the morale of the Sri Lankan state and to neutralize any Tamil political opposition, the LTTE engages in assassinating prominent leaders of all communities and senior military commanders. The LTTE also assassinated many powerful Sinhala political and military leaders, including;

- The minister of state for defense, General Ranjan Wijeratne (suicide car bomber)
- The former national security minister Lalith Athulathmudali (assassination)
- The presidential candidate and minister, Gamini Dissanayake (female suicide bomber)
- Navy commander Clancy Fernando (motorcycle suicide bomber)
- Army generals Denzil Kobbekaduwa, Wijaya Wimalaratna and Lakshman Wijeratna (land mines).

To prevent dissent, the LTTE maintains a number of prisons and execution programs. Among the LTTE leaders to be executed were Gopalaswamy Mahendrarajah, alias Ajith Mahattaya, and long-time deputy leader of the LTTE and a childhood friend of Prabhakaran. In addition to conducting deep penetration and front-line intelligence operations, the LTTE intelligence wing headed by Potto Amman is also responsible both for internal security and counter-intelligence.

## **INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE**

The International community's response to transnational insurgency has been weak. The LTTE along with several other insurgent groups have established offices and cells throughout the world. Most of these offices engage in disseminating propaganda and collecting money. In most countries the LTTE would collect money for the purchase of armaments under the guise of supporting rehabilitation. The LTTE has organized over 30 rallies and demonstrations in 1994 and 1995 in the west, including in front of the White House in Washington DC and the UN in New York. Ironically, the placards hoisted included photographs of Prabhakaran, who has taken the lives of two heads of government.

Many of the modern conflicts are ethnic or religion-oriented. Often they cannot be resolved militarily. Third party mediation is required because such culturally based conflicts are deep rooted and protracted. Is peace making a line in the non political spectrum of counter insurgency? Peace is the absence of war but interludes of peace as a strategy has been used both by the insurgents to regroup, rearm, and retain themselves and take on the state exploiting the element of surprise.

Although the international community will never allow a major inter state war, the international community should realize that intrastate wars have significant spill over effects that can complicate regional and international security to a very high degree. The 21<sup>st</sup> century insurgent groups will be very different from the twentieth century insurgents. Until recently, technology doubled every 25 years. Today, technology doubles every year. If not regulated and controlled, insurgents empowered by sub national groups will begin to use technology the same way governments use them. After the end of the Cold War, the porosity of the boundaries has transformed the international system dramatically. Countries cannot live in isolation any more. What will ensure the security of a nation-state is not only internal stability but the stability of one's neighbor and the region. Therefore, security of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will have to be cooperative and collective and not isolationist and individual.

### **OPERATIONAL ART AND TACTICAL DOCTRINE**

The LTTE has developed its own distinctive operational art and tactical doctrine, but it is still one largely drawn from past masters, Che Guevara, Giap, Mao and Debray. The LTTE doctrine is flexible enough to exploit the opportunities that arise from time to time.

As a highly innovative force, the LTTE is capable of retaliation against aggressions reprisals and pre-emptive strikes. Regular features of the LTTE doctrine are the unleashing of widespread terror on soft targets. Concentrating on lightly or unprotected targets is a classic diversionary tactic in warfare pinning down troops to static sentry/bunker duties and restraining search and destroy operations. The LTTE has bombed Sri Lankan commercial aircrafts, trains and buses, gunned down priests, nuns, pilgrims and bystanders in a sacred royal city and shot Muslims while worshipping in mosques, frequently raided non Tamil border villages and towns, massacring men, women and children, and land mined, ambushed and assaulted military and police patrols and posts.

Battle hardened LTTE cadres are deployed to strike heavily fortified military targets. The LTTE has vast experience in limited action against Sri Lankan forces and is highly developed in the art of mobile warfare. Over the years, the LTTE, both in terms of unconventional and semi-conventional capability, has grown. It is currently developing its conventional force capability. Mullaitivu<sup>23</sup> and Weli-Oya, where the command, training, ordinance and the logistical headquarters of the LTTE are located, has a reserve strike force to support military action in other commands. Unlike the case in conventional forces, the operational commanders of the LTTE always command their cadres from the front and not from the rear. This gives the LTTE

commander the distinct advantage of being able to direct the battle. Cadres are given freedom of operation within the mission.

Military operations in theatres other than the northeast are conducted largely by cadres of the intelligence wings or by Black Tiger suicide squads. These cadres depend on helpers mostly from the minority Tamil community, to play a supportive role providing basic intelligence, safe houses, transport or acting as couriers. The interdiction of these squads by government counter-intelligence units and by regular troops at check points have made the LTTE multiply the number of independent operational squads dispatched for strikes in Colombo.

The LTTE naval wing, the Sea Tigers, is operational in the seas of the northeast, but the Sea Black Tiger units are capable of operating elsewhere, including in Colombo. The LTTE Sky Tigers built two airstrips that were destroyed by the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF). The Sky Tigers are therefore aerially inoperative, but in collaboration with the Black Tigers and the anti-aircraft unit have staged spectacular strikes destroying several aircraft both in the air and on the ground.

The LTTE international network operates in at least 40 countries. International propaganda and fund-raising is mostly coordinated by LTTE leaders based both in the UK and France, mostly through the following fronts:

- World Tamil Movement
- International Federation of Tamils
- International Secretariat of the LTTE.

The LTTE procurement, barcodes and shipping networks remain classified, although ships frequently move between Turkey, Ukraine and Myanmar/Thailand via Mullaitivu in northern Sri Lanka.

## **TRAINING**

The LTTE has kept its membership small, but invested heavily in training and discipline, greater command and control and ideological indoctrination and psychological war training. War training and fighting is a must for all cadres ranging in age from 14 to 40. The Tamil Tiger code compels its rank and file to abstain from alcohol, smoking and extramarital sex. The penalty for violation is instant death. The strength of the LTTE also lies in the potassium cyanide capsule strung around the neck of every male or female cadre. When capture is imminent, the LTTE code mandates its consumption. The broken glass pierces the gum and poison permeates into the bloodstream, thus assuring an instant, painless death. Such martyrs would, along with Hindu gods and goddesses, be eulogized and venerated.



Initially trained in the desolate farms and jungle hideouts of northern Sri Lanka, and later by Farad (1977) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (1983-86) in the Syrian controlled Bekka Valley in Lebanon, the Tamil militants have mastered rural and urban warfare by experience. Operating out of training camps in the northern jungles and from bases across India, the militants isolated the writ of the government and confined its movement of troops by staging deadly ambushes and land mine attacks.

All LTTE recruits undergo a regular training course of four months. Advanced training courses, called commando training, or special training for specialized tasks such as intelligence, communication, explosives and naval functions, are conducted in different training bases.<sup>24</sup> In 1994 the LTTE academy for training 'an officer category' came in to operation. Both male and female recruits are trained independently but they participate in attacks jointly. There are regular training courses to enhance combat efficiency as well as to update the cadres on the latest developments on the battlefield.

A very important feature of the LTTE training curriculum is the incorporation of lessons learnt from past barriers. After the LTTE lost over 500 cadres in the Elephant Pass camp attack in 1991, the self-criticism that followed set the tone for the establishment of special reconnaissance groups. The LTTE reconnaissance groups mount surveillance on military targets over long periods. Often, the LTTE map and models department makes either scale or real life models of camps or other military installations and LTTE cadres train on them. LTTE successes are largely attributed to qualities of leadership, physical and psychological war training and use of state-of-the-art communication equipment for controlling the battle.

## **BASES AND TRAINING AREAS**

Dependent on the level of threat, LTTE bases can be broadly divided into three categories, static, semi-static and mobile. LTTE bases in high threat areas are mobile, and in relatively secure areas are semi-static. The LTTE bases in areas where the Sri Lankan military is dominant are mobile and small, while those in areas where the LTTE is dominant are static and large. Training areas are invariably located in static or semi-static bases. However, all LTTE cadres engage either in training or retraining, at least to a limited degree, in almost all bases except those outside the northeast. In early 1997 LTTE bases on the outskirts of Kilinochchi, Mannar, northern Vavuniya, northern Puttalam and Mullativu /Weli Oya were located in Kunchi Paranthan, Nachchikuda, Akkarayankulam, Iranamadu, Kokavil, Murikandy, Vishva Madu, Devi Puram, Muthiyankattu Kulam, Mullaitivu, Thanniuttu, Chemmalal, Kodalikallu, Nedunkerni, Semmadu Kulam, Olumadu, Therankanddai, Tunukkai, Mallavi, Vavimi

Kulam, Nandandandai, Periyamadu, Parappakadartan, Marunkan, Pandivirischian, Palakuli, Silavathurai, Achchankulam and Suddapiddi. By mid 1997, the LTTE bases between northern Vavuniya and Mannar were dismantled. The number of LTTE bases in the Eastern Province had increased since late 1996 but they were mostly mobile or semi-static. The semi-static bases were located mostly in the hinterland of the Eastern Province where the military had restricted access. The largest training base was the four-base complex in Mullaitivu, where at least 500 cadres were being trained at any given time of the year.

Although Tamil militant groups stopped training in the Middle East after the 1980s, there is evidence that in the 1990s small numbers were trained in Thailand by former Norwegian naval instructors in underwater sabotage, and in Sudan in the use of the global position system (GPS). South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) has also taught political classes to the LTTE since the mid-1990s. LTTE cadres are also trained to fly ultra lights in France and in the UK. Some of the cadres that trained in the UK have been identified as belonging to the Black Tiger Suicide Squad. There are unconfirmed reports that LTTE cadres also engaged in ultra light flying in Switzerland and in Australia.

## **INVENTORIES**

The acquisition of three types of stand-off weapons classifies a terrorist group as technologically advanced: surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and light anti-tank weapons. The LTTE acquired RPGs and anti-tank weapons in 1984 and SAMs in 1994, and have used all three types of weapons with efficiency. The LTTE has at least 50 tons of TNT and 10 tons of RDX, procured from the Rube zone Chemical Plant in Ukraine in 1994 by providing false end-user certificates. The LTTE has captured about 10,000 automatic weapons from the Sri Lankan and Indian armed forces, as well as from rival Tamil groups. Including the light weapons procured by the LTTE from overseas as well as those provided by Indian (1983-87) and Sri Lankan governments (1989-90), the LTTE possessed about 15,000 light weapons. The LTTE has acquired long range artillery from strikes on Sri Lankan military camps from 1993 onwards. This includes one army tank and at least four high-speed water jet boats. The LTTE also has a fleet of between 500 and 1,000 fiber glass boats and between six and 10 mirage class boats. The LTTE has between 50 and 100 frogman kits and five to 10 underwater scooters. Although not used in the past, the LTTE has five micro light plane kits and at least five gliders. The LTTE emphasizes the improvisation of technology to enhance their military capability. Suicide bomb technology has undergone unprecedented innovation under the guidance of the LTTE. In 1997 at least 125 suicide bomb kits were in the possession of the

LTTE. Latest intelligence indicate that the LTTE has been developing an explosive-laden light aircraft – that does not carry sufficient metal for radar detection – to accurately strike a political, military or economic target aided by a global positioning system. Because of the seizure of a mini-submarine under LTTE construction in Tamil Nadu India, the LTTE is now planning to purchase a mini-submarine from an Eastern European state.

#### **KNOWN ARMS AND SUPPLIERS/ROUTES**

In August 1983, in Salonika, Greece, two West Germans were sentenced to four years imprisonment on charges of illegal transport of arms and ammunition, by a transport plane which took off from East Berlin and landed in Salonika. The plane was headed for Sri Lanka, where the LTTE was scheduled to pick up the 267 cases in the plane which contained 300,000 rounds of automatic rifle ammunition and 400 rockets.

According to intelligence reports, most of the arms used by the LTTE are purchased from Singapore, India, Afghanistan and the Middle East. Soviet-made AK47 automatic Kalashnikovs, T56 Chinese assault rifles, the Indian-Belgian AKMS, and the M16 manufactured by the Colt company in the United States (believed to have been obtained by way of Vietnam) have been the common weapons of the LTTE guerrillas.

In the late 1980s and early 1990, the LTTE is known to have received weapons from munitions factories in India. In 1990, the LTTE was receiving small weapons from factories in the Tamil Nadu centers of Ranipet, Cimbuaore, Salem, and Trichengode.

In 1987, the Hindustan Times reported that large quantities of arms with Pakistani and Israeli markings were seized by the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Jaffna from the LTTE.

In 1989, according to a Sri Lankan government secretary, the LTTE was receiving armaments directly from the Sri Lankan government of President Ranasinghe Premadasa, who wanted to force the expulsion of the Indian Peacekeeping Force from Sri Lanka, and who was also using the LTTE to wipe out the JVP (People's Liberation Front) Sinhala insurgency.

In November 1991, the Indian Navy seized a large ship carrying large amounts of arms, ammunition, and clothes from Singapore to the LTTE.

In October 1993, the Indian daily "The Pioneer" charged that Pakistan had been clandestinely supplying arms to the LTTE, from a location close to the Karachi port. Sources in Dubai said this arms supply line was uncovered when an Indian naval vessel intercepted the LTTE ship "MV Yahata Maru" on January 16, 1993.

In November 1994, the Sri Lankan government asked the Indian Navy to intercept a suspected arms shipment to the LTTE, believed to be 10 tons of arms and explosives coming from a "Black Sea port."

The LTTE has now acquired radar guided anti-aircraft missiles, according to July 1995 reports. The LTTE reportedly has bought Russian-made Strela anti-aircraft missiles from Belgian arms dealers.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Despite the military reversals it suffered in late 1995, throughout 1996 and into early 1997 the LTTE remains a formidable threat to both Sri Lanka and Indian security. Although the LTTE's domestic infrastructure for raising funds and generating recruits has dwindled in scope, international support engendered by spectacular military strikes and the creation of over half a million displaced persons has helped them to establish a base of support for the organization. Losing Mannar to the Sri Lankan military remains a massive blow to the morale of the LTTE. However, the strategic retreat from Jaffna, in the wake of the massive conventional military thrust by Sri Lankan forces, helped the LTTE to preserve its fighting capability. Recoveries of weaponry achieved by overrunning Sri Lankan military camps and acquisitions through international procurements have enabled the LTTE to maintain a large reserve of weapons and ammunition.

Despite the low morale caused by relinquishing territorial control of Jaffna, the LTTE maintains a very high level of readiness through effective training, state-of-the-art equipment and, for a guerrilla force, unparalleled battle control technology. Within the space of a few hours the LTTE has the ability to concentrate a force of 5,000 cadres to strike a military facility anywhere in northeastern Sri Lanka or to launch long-ranged deep-penetration operations, ranging from suicide<sup>25</sup>/commando style attacks to bombings in the capital. Despite tight security, the LTTE has been successful both in overrunning highly fortified camps and infiltrating Colombo and carrying out bomb attacks and assassinations

Since mid 1986, the government has begun to reflect on the network and fight the network. Strategically, LTTE procurement operations can be restrained by generating an excellent counter propaganda network. Tactically, counter propaganda should be conducted with the support of Sri Lankans living overseas(individually or through their associations)by the Sri Lankan foreign missions.<sup>26</sup> For this , Sri Lanka's classical foreign policy role of liaison with governments must change. Sri Lanka must aim for an innovative foreign policy to meet the current challenges and future threats. At least 40% of the foreign policy budget and 40% of the

time of Sri Lankan diplomats should be geared to fighting LTTE propaganda and building support between Sri Lanka and foreign governments against the LTTE.

Today the international security and intelligence community generally assesses the LTTE as the world's most ruthless terrorist organization.<sup>27</sup> It is the only organization to have assassinated two heads of government<sup>28</sup> and to have developed a daring guerrilla navy capable of checkmating a powerful conventional navy<sup>29</sup> commanded by British and US-trained naval officers.

It is likely that the LTTE threat to Sri Lanka and Indian security will be maintained. Despite the frequent pronouncements of political and military leaders, the LTTE will remain a formidable force until the government of Sri Lanka either develops force structures sufficient to destroy the LTTE militarily or accepts international offers to mediate a negotiated settlement, paving the way for the entry of the LTTE into the legitimate political arena.

Sinhala only policy<sup>30</sup> of the government was the reason for the Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. The LTTE ideology is Tamil nationalism but it draws heavily on the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. The Tiger symbol is derived from the emblem of the expansionist Indian Tamil Chola dynasty. Its 43-years old charismatic leader and military commander,<sup>31</sup> Velupillai Prabhakaran (whose nom de guerre is Karikalan), is a highly disciplined, dedicated, self-taught, military genius.

The LTTE's role has been to break the will of the Sri Lankan state into conceding the northeast to the LTTE. To this end, the LTTE engaged the government politically and militarily.

In 1997 LTTE deployments<sup>32</sup> were Jaffna (200 cadres mostly intelligence), Kilinochchi (2,000 strong mostly in the outskirts of the town), Vavuniya (north of the military defense lines, about 2,000 men), Mullaitivu/Weliya (4,000 strong), Mannar (2,000 men), Trincomalee (1,000 men), Ampara/Batticaloa (2000). To engage military intrusions by the Sri Lankan forces into LTTE controlled areas, the LTTE has highly trained units that are increasingly developing their conventional force structures. These special regiments are known as Imran-Pandyan, Charles Anthony, Kittu, Commando, Malatho and Sothiya. These numbers will have changed as a result of Operation 'Victory Assured' although at present no figures are available.

Trading in gold, laundering money and trafficking narcotics bring the LTTE substantial revenue that is needed to procure sophisticated weaponry.<sup>33</sup> The Sam missiles procured from Cambodia cost the LTTE US dollars 1 million a piece.<sup>34</sup> The gold that is collected in Jaffna, initially two sovereigns from each family for the war budget, is melted and ingots are formed and transported across the Palk Straits to Tamil Nadu. The ingots are sold by the LTTE male and female couriers in Tiruchi, Coimbatore and Bombay markets. With the help of Thanjavur smugglers, the money is ploughed back to procure war materials. Supplies purchased in India

are smuggled back to Sri Lanka from the Ramanathapuram to Thanjavur coastline to Jaffna and Talaimannar. The LTTE money laundering activities is not very different to the systems used by the Latin American narcotics cartels.<sup>35</sup> Money is invested in legitimate ventures that make it difficult for security and intelligence agencies to monitor their investments, accounts, transfers and investments. Although, the LTTE narcotic trafficking operations remain highly secretive, Western and Asian security and intelligence agencies have since recently made some significant detection's from the Philippines to Germany and from Italy to Canada. It is believed that the LTTE transports heroin on board LTTE owned ships from Myanmar to Europe.<sup>36</sup> The LTTE also has their own fleet of vehicles in many countries from Tamil Nadu to Ontario. They also play a role in providing passports, other papers, and engage in human smuggling.

For generating revenue, the ships also transports fertilizer, timber, flour, rice paddy, sugar cement and other commercial goods.<sup>37</sup> During the PA-LTTE peace talks, there were three shipments. The ship Sweeney transported 50 tons of TNT and 10 tons of RDX purchased from a chemical plant from Nicholave, a Black Sea port in the Ukraine. Only 300 to 400 kg of this quantity was used in early 1996 to devastate the heart of Colombo's financial district by the LTTE. Similarly, a consignment of SAM-7s procured from Cambodia via Thailand reached Sri Lanka. This was the most expensive military cargo, the LTTE had ever transported. To save high registration costs, the ships are registered in the flag giver countries of Panama, Honduras, and Liberia, affectionately known as "Pan-ho-lib."

Although the LTTE has lost India as an operational base, it has expanded its extra-regional operational capability by procuring several ocean-going vessels. Worldwide operations in support of the insurgency propaganda, fund-raising, procurement of military hardware and transportation – is de-stabilizing the international arena. The LTTE is a role model and a trendsetter for existing and emerging terrorist groups in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.

Internationally, the LTTE has not only been active politically and economically. Their extensive political and economic presence has enabled them to be militarily active as well. The LTTE understood quite early that in order to expand their political and economic power base, they will have to strengthen their legal as well as extralegal capability outside Sri Lanka. Although small in number, the LTTE has assassinated Tamils in Europe, North America and in South Asia. Today, at least the Law enforcement agencies of three European governments particularly prohibit Sri Lankan Tamils from carrying weapons on themselves.

Governments in the Asia-Pacific region believe that that LTTE is emerging as a major destabilizing force. As a group, the LTTE is at the cutting edge of technology. In Sri Lanka, the

first rocket propelled grenade launcher was recovered from a LTTE camp. Similarly, night vision glasses were used for the first time in the Sri Lankan battlefield by the LTTE. The LTTE, at the forefront of insurgent technological innovation, has gained mastery in the use of dual technology. Before the Sri Lankan military, the LTTE purchased Global Positioning Satellite systems, to accurately target its projectiles. The LTTE also used a land based satellite system to communicate with its overseas cadres. The LTTE has used the World Wide Web and the Internet to establish a sophisticated state-of-the-art propaganda as well as a communication system within its members and supporters. LTTE suicide bombers have been trained both in France and in Britain to fly light aircraft. These ultra lights do not carry sufficient metal for radar detection. Further, they could take off from a short runway. It is likely that these aircraft laden with explosives will be used to take vital economic, political and military targets, reminiscent of the Kamikazis.<sup>38</sup>

WORD COUNT=7,281

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> It sparked off when for the 1<sup>st</sup> time 13 soldiers, all Sinhalese, were killed in an ambush on the night of 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Sinhala and Tamil communities.

<sup>3</sup> Velupillai Prabakaran is the current leader in Sri Lanka. Oxford University-trained Anton Balasingham, residing in London and Paris, is the public spokesman for the LTTE. Pottu Amman is the LTTE intelligence chief and Sooriya Kumaran Selvadurai is the LTTE leader in (west) Germany, who is reputed to be a multi-millionaire drug dealer.

<sup>4</sup> Southern State capital of India. Only 36 miles away and a 45-minute cruise by a speed boat.

<sup>5</sup> Majority of presence are in Canada, Australia, US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland and Scandinavia.

<sup>6</sup> By examining other Diaspora communities, the Sri Lankan Tamil expatriate community formed following the 1983 riots, can be classified as a Diaspora. Today, the pre-and the post-1983 Sri Lankan Tamil émigrés are hardly distinguishable. Therefore, both groupings can be collectively identified as the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora.

<sup>7</sup> Only terrorist organization in the world to own a fleet of ships.

<sup>8</sup> President Jayewardene's government in 1977 became pro west and changed the government policies from Non Alignment to become an ally of the west.

<sup>9</sup> Had a very close relation with the former Prime-Minister Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Her decision to support the LTTE was the turning point and became an armed conflict.

<sup>10</sup> Indian army general and commander of the Indian Peace Keeping force (IPKF), expressed surprise with the discovery of RAW training imparted to the LTTE Sea Tigers, on the eve of the IPKF-LTTE confrontation. He immediately ordered the protection of the IPKF naval installations in northeastern Sri Lanka against LTTE naval sabotage.

<sup>11</sup> The CIA together with the Indian IB had established this top secret facility coded Establishment Two-Two, initially to impart training to the Khanpa nationalists. Later, Raw took over the Chakrata base.

<sup>12</sup> Son of Premier Indira Gandhi.

<sup>13</sup> IPKF had more than 2000 soldiers killed in the IPKF-LTTE confrontation in Sri Lanka. All commanders of IPKF had to pre-maturely retire due to non accomplishment of the mission.

<sup>14</sup> Finally had more than 150,000 troops deployed in Sri Lanka.

<sup>15</sup> LTTE eliminated the military capability of PLOTE, EPRLF, TELO, EROS, and EPDP.

<sup>16</sup> He rose up to become the Leader of the Opposition in the parliament of the 1977 government, even though representing a minority party.



<sup>17</sup> Jaffna was recaptured in the year 1995 and the government control was established in the northern capital.

<sup>18</sup> Where the maximum number of IPKF soldiers were killed.

<sup>19</sup> The explosion at the Central Bank of Ceylon.

<sup>20</sup> An Artillery gun belonging to the Sri Lanka Army was captured by the LTTE.

<sup>21</sup> Mostly located in Mullaitivu.

<sup>22</sup> Most of the food is forcibly taken over by the LTTE cadres, yet the government dispatches food to the uncontrolled areas.

<sup>23</sup> Location of the famous one four base. IPKF had two companies massacred in location.

<sup>24</sup> Mostly located in Welis-Oya and Mullaitivu.

<sup>25</sup> First terrorist organization to use the human bomb.

<sup>26</sup> Most hitherto generated propaganda would only polarize the two communities. By calling the LTTE "terrorists" and Tamil expatriates "their supporters," Sinhalese would become more nationalistic and Tamils more determined to fight for a separate Tamil state. Propaganda has not been conducted in Tamil. Recent study by the Institute of Strategic Studies, Ministry of Defense suggest that propaganda should (a) sympathize with the plight of the Tamil community (b) highlight the criminal wastage of Tamil lives and resources at the hands of Prabhakaran (c) list all the Tamil leaders have been exterminated by the LTTE (d) predict that there will be no democracy under the LTTE (e) assess that India will never allow Tamil Eelam to be established and (f) call for an alternate Tamil leadership.

<sup>27</sup> Has a child brigade in its organization.

<sup>28</sup> President Premadasa of Sri Lanka and Premier Rajiv Gandhi of India.

<sup>29</sup> The Indian Navy.

<sup>30</sup> Sinhala was made the official language of the country by the 1956 Bandaranaike regime.

<sup>31</sup> No formal education. Born to a fisherman family in a village called Velvettiturai in the Jaffna peninsula.

<sup>32</sup> Information obtained from the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB).

<sup>33</sup> Trading in narcotics generate huge profits. The LTTE paid for the SAMs-US \$ 1 million a piece-from narcotic profits. Although the governments of the Philippines, India, Germany, Italy, and Canada, have records of LTTE narcotics couriers, the Sri Lankan government is yet to unearth substantial information. This is confirmed by reviewing a report by Deputy Inspector General of Police in charge of narcotics PB Seneviratne submitted to Ambassador Philip Wilcox, coordinator counter terrorism, US State Department, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Colombo in 1996. Large consignments of brown sugar have been transported by the LTTE

between India and Sri Lanka. The LTTE has exercised tremendous caution in narcotics trafficking. Such operations are clandestine even as far as the senior LTTE leaders are concerned. Sri Lankan agencies have failed to pool all available information on the LTTE narcotics connection and provide them to friendly agencies-from Interpol to intelligence-for follow up action.

<sup>34</sup> Corrupt military generals of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces sold Russian made SAM 7s procured in the 1980s to both the LTTE and to the famous Opium warlord Khun SA. Bangkok based Robert Karniol, Asia Pacific Regional Editor for Jane's, and secret sources confirmed the purchase. According to Thai intelligence, Surface- to -Air-Missiles were moved from Koh Kong, extreme south west of Cambodia to Chunporn in Thailand and across Kra Isthmus to Phuket. This was one of the three shipments by the LTTE during the LTTE-PA talks.

<sup>35</sup> Almost all the major insurgent groups engage in narcotics trafficking. Columbia's FARC, Peru's Shinning Path, Myanmar's Khun SA militia, Turkey's PKK's and Afghanistan's Hizbi-Islami lead the list. The LTTE narcotics trafficking are carried out in high secrecy. The LTTE intelligence wing and those engaged in narcotics trafficking often use private boats as they want to be clandestine even as far as the other LTTE cadres are concerned. Narcotics trafficking generate an income between US \$ 100-150 to 400 million according to a specialist on narcotics and security Dr HP Klepak and the prestigious Groupe d'action financier international. See, HP Klepak(1985) The International Drug Trade-There's room for all. Jane's Intelligence Year book, UK.

<sup>36</sup> US experts estimate that 80% of the heroin found in the US originates from Myanmar. Similarly, according to 1996 data,80% of the heroin found in UK originates from Turkey.

<sup>37</sup> The LTTE would use these ships for clandestine activity only less than 5% of their shipping time. Most of these ships are manned by Sri Lankan Tamil civilians as well as LTTE cadres. These are foreigners working on board these ships too.

<sup>38</sup> Some of the cadres trained were Black Tigers. A key member of this program is Pampan Ajith, a former bodyguard of Prabhakaran, currently with the LTTE office in London. Until Jaffna was under LTTE control, the Sky Tiger base was in Kopay. Before that, the LTTE had another base in Eludumottuwan. Dr Maheswaran of the UK was the principal adviser to the LTTE on the Sky Tiger program. Based on an intelligence alert, during a visit to Jaffna to meet the LTTE leadership and to find a bride, he was arrested and remanded by the CID in Colombo. To the surprise of many he was released by the Sri Lankan courts because there was no provision in the current law to charge him. In the eyes of the law-givers, he had not committed a "criminal act." The LTTE is not a proscribed organization in Sri Lanka.



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